



DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION

OFFICE OF MINE RECLAMATION

801 K STREET • MS 09-06 • SACRAMENTO, CALIFORNIA 95814

PHONE 916 / 323-9198 • FAX 916 / 445-6066 • TDD 916 / 324-2555 • WEB SITE conservation.ca.gov

California's Abandoned Mine Lands Program Fact Sheet Stay Out - Stay Alive!

• Every year, people are injured or killed in accidents on abandoned mine property in California (see summaries below), which is why the motto of the Department of Conservation's **Abandoned Mine Lands Unit (AMLU)** is "**Stay Out - Stay Alive!**" This message is part of a national campaign aimed at warning the public about the dangers associated with abandoned mines.

• Please report abandoned mines in California by calling the AMLU's toll-free hotline at **1-877-OLD-MINE (1-877-653-6463)**.

• Outreach is an important part of the AMLU's program. AMLU staff respond to **1-877-OLD-MINE** calls and participate in safety fairs, Earth Day events, and kids' days.



Year	County	Abandoned Mine Accidents in California (2002 to date) (See also the U.S. Mine Safety and Health Administration website at www.msha.gov/sosa/SOSAhome.asp .)
2006	Kern	A 9-year-old boy was rescued and flown to a hospital after falling about 40 feet down an abandoned mine shaft (vertical opening) while on his motorcycle.
	El Dorado	Two workers, who entered an abandoned mine to pump water to fill a water tanker, were overcome by the pump's gas fumes and died. A third person was hurt trying to rescue the victims.
	Riverside	A man riding an off-road vehicle fell 40 feet down an abandoned mine shaft; 18 firefighters worked approximately seven hours to rescue him.
	San Bernardino	A 41-year-old man walked about 40 feet into an adit (horizontal opening) on private property and died after falling 50 feet down an internal shaft. One week later, another man fell into the same shaft; about 60 emergency workers helped to rescue him.
	Imperial	Two men, riding off-road in an area where travel is restricted to identified safe routes, were trapped for about 20 hours after they drove their vehicle into a shaft.
2005	Kern	Two men were trapped at the bottom of a 40-foot shaft while looking at nesting owls.
2004	Kern	A man, driving on a dirt road with his family, nearly backed into a 53-foot-deep abandoned mine shaft; he stopped with his car's left rear tire hanging over the edge.
	San Bernardino	A 21-year-old motorcyclist died after falling hundreds of feet into an uncovered shaft.
	Riverside	A 16-year-old girl suffered head injuries after falling 40 to 50 feet down a rock quarry.
	Kern	An 11-year-old boy plunged with his dirt bike 40 feet into a shaft.
2003	Kern	A 13-year-old boy discovered an abandoned mine while motorcycling, walked into the mine entrance, and was injured when he fell 30 feet down an internal shaft.
	Del Norte	A man and his 19-year-old son drove their vehicle into a 70-foot air shaft. The father died, and the son sustained serious injuries.
	Kern	A 32-year old motorcyclist was injured after falling about 50 feet into a shaft.
	San Bernardino	A 14-year-old motorcyclist fell 25 feet into a shaft and was rescued by his father.
2002	Orange	Two brothers exploring a flooded, abandoned mine tried to swim deeper into the mine, but died in the murky, gas-clogged water.
	Kern	A 10-year-old boy riding a bike with his family fell 200 feet down a shaft. He was trapped for four hours, but had no major injuries.

*The Department of Conservation's mission is to protect Californians and their environment by:
Protecting lives and property from earthquakes and landslides; Ensuring safe mining and oil and gas drilling;
Conserving California's farmland; and Saving energy and resources through recycling.*

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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

(The following are responses to some safety-related frequently asked questions (FAQs) received by staff of the Department of Conservation’s Abandoned Mine Lands Unit (AMLU). Please see all our FAQs at www.conservation.ca.gov/OMR/abandoned_mine_land/FAQs.pdf, or e-mail us at OMR@conservation.ca.gov, if you have other abandoned mine-related questions.)

1. What should I do in an emergency involving an abandoned mine?

Call 911 or contact your local sheriff’s office. If someone is injured due to a fall or is trapped in an abandoned mine, do not try to rescue the victim yourself. Rescue attempts should only be made by professionals with proper training and equipment to avoid further injury to the victim or yourself.

2. How do I report an abandoned mine other than in an emergency situation?

As stated above, the AMLU has a toll-free phone number (**877-OLD-MINE**) for reporting abandoned mines in California. The AMLU can perform field visits to reported sites, depending on resource constraints and other obligations at the time the report is made to the AMLU.

3. Are abandoned mines dangerous?

Many abandoned mines in California date back to the Gold Rush and, by their nature, were temporary. Because removing rock and soil weakens structural integrity, miners compensated by adding support inside mines as needed and by accepting any dangers involved in working in a mine. In an abandoned mine, supports may have deteriorated or been removed, increasing the chance that the mine may collapse. Other reasons why abandoned mines are dangerous include, but are not limited to, the following.

- Internal workings such as winzes, drifts, and stopes may present falling hazards and can disorient visitors, leaving them lost underground.
- Rotten boards covered in dust can disguise winzes, creating a fall hazard on seemingly stable ground.
- Blasting caps or dynamite left behind can be extremely unstable and may detonate at any time.
- Visitors to an abandoned mine may encounter pockets of oxygen-depleted air or lethal gas (such as carbon monoxide) that can cause asphyxiation.
- Dust particles originating from abandoned mine sites may cause health problems due to naturally-occurring elements such as asbestos, arsenic, or chromium, or diseases such as hantavirus or valley fever.
- Abandoned mines are often used as habitat by wildlife, including rattlesnakes.
- Chemical and environmental hazards created by mines can pose health threats to visitors, the public at large, and wildlife. Visitors can be exposed to high levels of toxic waste left over from the processing of ore. Water in a mine can react with sulfide-bearing rock to produce acid-generating conditions. This acid-bearing water is capable of leaching heavy metals from rock, creating acid rock drainage (ARD) or acid mine drainage (AMD).

